



# Measles

May 2008

## What is measles?

Measles is a viral disease that causes fever and a rash. In rare cases, it can cause serious complications. Measles can be spread easily from person to person. It is also known as rubeola. Measles should not be confused with rubella which is a milder illness that was once known as 'German' or '3-day' measles.

## Who gets measles?

People who are not fully vaccinated against measles or have not had the illness are at risk of getting measles. Measles is rare in Washington and the United States because most children are vaccinated against measles. Currently, most measles disease in the United States is related to travel outside of the United States by persons who have not been vaccinated or to foreign visitors who come to the United States after being exposed to measles in their home country.

## How is measles spread?

Measles is primarily spread when infected people cough or sneeze, sending droplets containing the measles virus into the air so that they can be inhaled by others. Measles can also be transmitted when moist secretions from the nose or mouth of an infected person come in contact with the mouth, nose or eyes of another person. Measles is very easily spread from an infected person to others during the four or five days before and four days after the rash starts. This means measles can be transmitted before the person has a rash.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles usually starts with a fever, runny nose, cough, and red, watery eyes. After several days of these symptoms, a rash develops which usually starts on the face and spreads downward to cover most of the body. The rash can last from several days to a week or more. About 30 percent of persons with measles develop one or more complication, such as diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia. Measles can sometimes cause very serious complications such as encephalitis, seizures, and death, although this is uncommon.

**How soon after infection do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms generally appear 10 days after a person who is not immune is exposed to someone with measles. The time it takes to develop symptoms may range from 7 to 21 days.

**How is measles diagnosed?**

Measles must be confirmed by laboratory testing.

**How is measles treated?**

There is no specific treatment for measles.

**What can be done to prevent measles?**

Most persons born before 1957 had measles and are immune. For persons born in 1957 or later, the best way to prevent measles is to get vaccinated.

**Which children should receive measles vaccine?**

Two doses of vaccine are currently recommended for all children, the first at age 12–15 months and the second before school entry at 4–6 years of age. Both doses should be given on or after the first birthday and at least 28 days apart.

Children who have had only one measles vaccination dose and who are traveling outside the United States are recommended to get a second dose of measles vaccine prior to travel.

**Which adults should receive measles vaccine?**

Most people born before 1957 have had measles and therefore are immune. Adults born in or after 1957 should receive one dose of vaccine if they have not had measles and have not received a measles vaccination in 1968 or later. A blood test can determine if someone has had measles in the past.

A second dose of measles vaccine is recommended for health care workers, students attending college or other post-high school institutions, and international travelers.

**What should I do if I was around someone with measles?**

If you have not been vaccinated or had measles, consult your health care provider or local health department immediately. Your doctor might recommend you get vaccinated or receive a medicine called immune globulin that might prevent or modify measles.

For more information, contact:

Your local health department: [www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) , or  
Communicable Disease Epidemiology at (206) 418-5500 or toll-free 877-539-4344